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Two Conspiracies In JFK Death?

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Was Lee Harvey Oswald standing quietly in a doorway of the Texas School Book Depository at the time official records say he was killing President John F. Kennedy with a rifle shot fired from a sixth-floor window?

The answer is yes, according to Robert J. Groden, the earnest young author with F. Peter Model of the new paperback "JFK: The Case for Conspiracy."

In Orlando last week, Groden said pictures in the book — some never before published — prove that Oswald could not have been the assassin.

AND: "THERE PROBABLY were two conspiracies," Groden said. "The coverup is evident. The conspiracy to kill the President is harder to prove."

The book suggests as probable assassination conspirators the Mafia, renegade CIA men, and anti-Castro zealots disgruntled by Kennedy's refusal to openly invade Cuba.

Kennedy was killed and Texas Gov. John B. Connally Jr. wounded in "a crossfire with all the earmarks of a paramilitary operation," Groden insists.

At 12:30 p.m. CST on Friday, Nov. 22, 1963, Groden was taking a nap at his parents' home in Forest Hills, N.Y. He had stayed home from high school, to celebrate his 18th birthday.

"My sister came in, waking me with the cry that President Kennedy had been shot."

The fusillade in Dallas set the direction of young Groden's life.

"WHEN THE Warren Commission report came out I believed it — for two years. Then, and I won't tell you how — it's the only question I will not answer frankly — in 1965 I got possession of a first-generation copy of the Abraham Zapruder film."

The gruesome "home movie," taken by a horrified Dallas clothing manufacturer whose finger had frozen on the shutter release when the first shot was fired, recorded the whole assassination in color. The film figured prominently in the official investigation, and frames were featured in Time, Life and other publications.

What Groden saw in the film, he said, shattered his trust in the Warren report, and it made him "deathly afraid." He locked the film in a safety vault where it lay until 1968 when New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison tried to launch a new investigation.

Robert Groden

MEANWHILE, Groden had kept on collecting assassination films.

"They seemed to gravitate to me, as if I were a magnet," he said. At age 30, Groden, now a multimedia technician specializing in photooptical image restoration, owns the largest private collection of such films in existence.

Reassured, he said, by "the Garrison affair" that he was not alone in his concern, he retrieved the Zapruder films and began repairing scratches — one frame was partially obscured by a man's heelprint — clearing off dirt and clarifying the images.

"I WORKED OUT a new process of film recovery," he said. But that was incidental. He said he found "undeniable proof Kennedy was killed in a crossfire of at least seven shots — ergo, a conspiracy."

In 1973, he began showing his films on college campuses and making notes for a book. Two years ago, he began to collaborate with Model, who had written about the Kennedy assassination in Argosy.

Model did the writing, Groden said. The style is clear and terse, keeping its tense narrative quality through a labyrinth of detail and timing of events, facts and the authors' interpretations.

"IT'S A QUIET, sane overview," Groden said. "We worked together. I'm a radical on the issue and Peter is a conservative. I would have pulled out more stops if I'd been writing it alone."

At times, the authors resort to irony, as in passages about a theory of attorney Arlen Specter, which was accepted by the Warren Commission.

"As he presented it ... that back shot was a neck shot, entering the President at an angle of 15 degrees, exiting downward from his throat ...

"IT HOVERED in the air for 1.8 seconds and then, with sharp, angular deviation — like a bumblebee — zigzagged into Connally's back below the right armpit ....

"Maintaining its onward flightpath, the bullet now shattered his fifth rib, causing bone fragments to penetrate and collapse his right lung, exiting below his right nipple and leaving behind a 5 cm. sucking wound.

"Next, this superbullet penetrated Connolly's right wrist from the back, shattered the radial wristbone into seven or eight pieces, and upon exiting, entered his right thigh five or six inches above the knee, penetrating to a depth of about three inches.

"FINALLY, mirabile dictu! this bullet still had sufficient energy to work its way out of the thigh and burrow itself under the stretcher mattress at the hospital ... Even more wondrous, this bullet ... emerged in near-pristine condition."

The authors imply, by citing testimony that Jack Ruby, Oswald's slayer, was seen in the hospital at the time in question, that he may have planted the bullet which was found under the mattress about an hour after Connally was taken into emergency surgery.

In Orlando, Groden said 82 per cent of Americans are skeptical of the Warren report.

"The American people have been effectively lied to," he said. "If Oswald was deliberately selected as a patsy, killed and convicted posthumously of a President's murder, it's more frightening than most people realize."